

Project Endings:

early impressions from
our recent survey on
project longevity in DH

Stewart Arneil, Martin Holmes, and Greg Newton



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- Endings: Concluding, Archiving, and Preserving Digital Projects for Long-Term Usability



The Project

- Endings: Concluding, Archiving, and Preserving Digital Projects for Long-Term Usability
- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada



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- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
- Developing practical strategies for...
 - Concluding and preserving scholarly digital projects
 - Maintaining long-term usability
 - Aligning aims of researchers producing projects and archivists



HOW STANDARDS PROLIFERATE:
(SEE: A/C CHARGERS, CHARACTER ENCODINGS, INSTANT MESSAGING, ETC)



The Survey

- How sustainable are DH projects in the long-term?
 - 37 questions in 5 categories
 - 128 responses
 - 25 follow-up interviews



The Respondents

- Most of the projects are less than 10 years old
- Most of them started with born-digital data
- More than half are ongoing



The Results

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- One-third use WordPress or Drupal



The Results: a deeper dive

The Good

- 54% used free and open-source tools
- 64% have offline backups
- 73% had campus partners offer support for long-term preservation
- 73% have NOT been affected by software obsolescence



The Results: a deeper dive

The Bad

- 24% do not have the project data available online
- 19% of the projects are dormant or abandoned
- 23% have been affected by software obsolescence

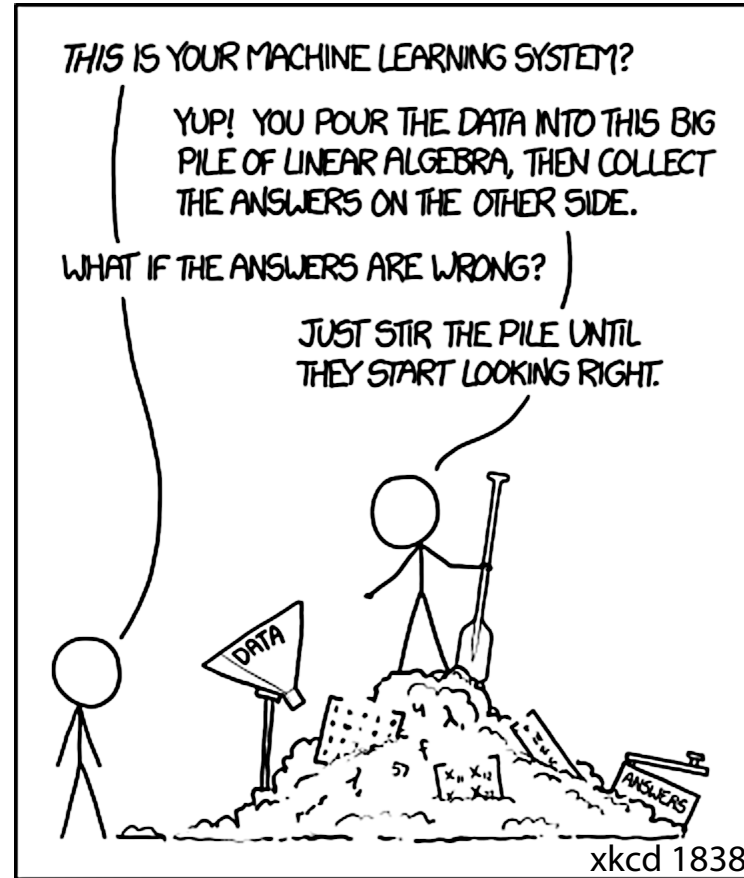


The Results: a deeper dive

The Ugly

- 60% had no precise timeline for the project
- 80% of the projects remain incomplete and un-archived
- 54% had no long-term preservation in mind at the outset
- 90% considered their technical documentation less-than-adequate

The Danger



The Interviews

- 20 – 60 minutes each
- Marked up using TEI and a categorization scheme
- Analytics in-progress



The Takeaway: projects



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More planning around preservation/sustainability



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Consider how to preserve the most essential aspects



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The Takeaway: projects

“how do you protect a resource like this ... when the players leave the institution”

“Pls die...or retire, you know”

Plan for personnel change at the highest level



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Make early arrangements for institutional hosting



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Use well-supported markup languages like XML/XHTML

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Many copies in many places (LOCKSS)



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Ending is easier if planned from the start



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Researchers need project planning training



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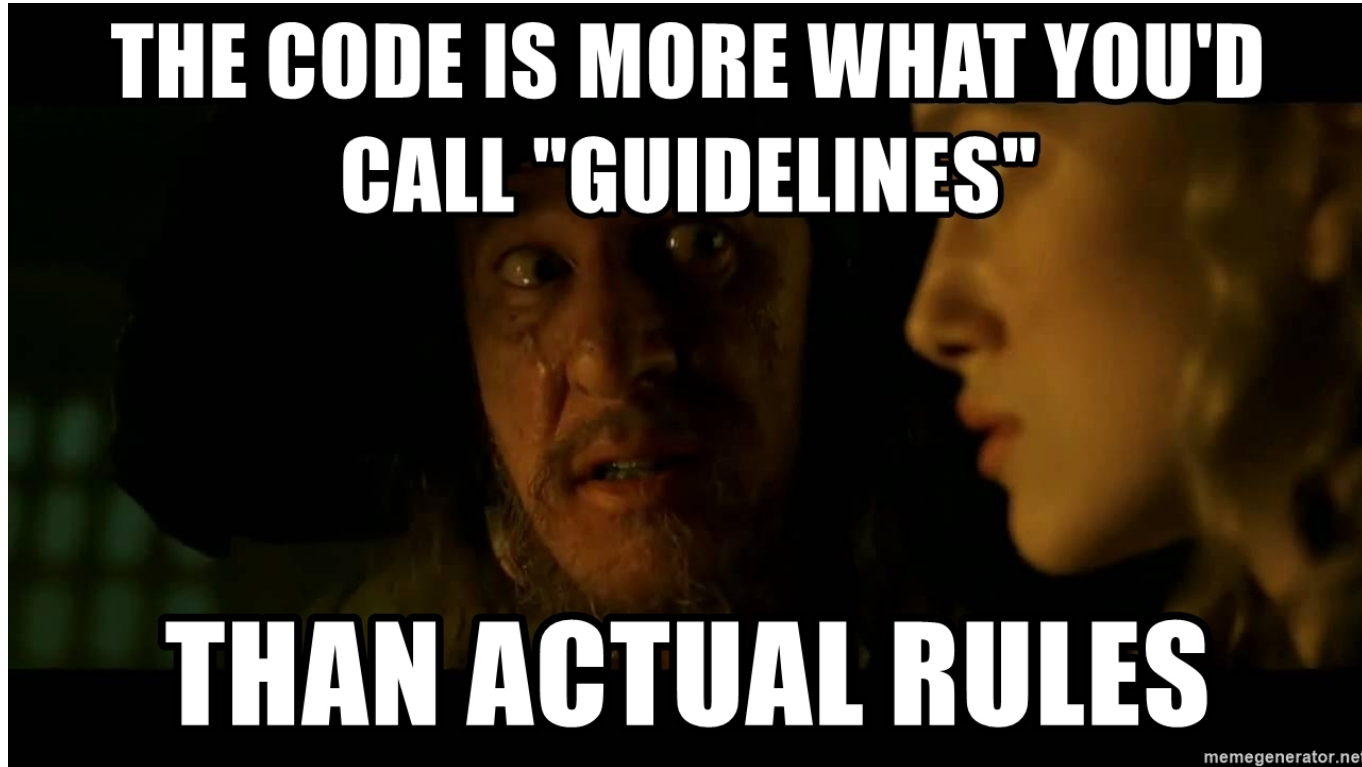
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Projects need long-term library/archive support

p.s. follow-up after project completion date



The Clarification



The Principles

- *Data*: the expression of the source information, knowledge, and researcher expertise
- *Products*: project output intended for end-users (e.g. websites or print documents). Includes documentation.
- *Processing*: code written and maintained by project technical staff
- *Documentation*: includes data models and rights/IP issues
- *Release Management*: clearly identifiable releases made on milestones/successful validation



The Golden Ring

- Choose 'archivable' file formats based on open standards
- Avoid dependencies on exotic software, network, and databases
- Validate products and document the process
- Make principled releases to multiple open-access repositories



The Future

- Workshops/seminars/symposia
- Test scalability with larger projects
- Formal publication of survey/interview findings
- Publish more guidelines, recipes, and toolkits



The Questionnaire

<https://hcmc.uvic.ca/endings/questionnaire.htm>



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- Thought-provoking project assessment tool
- Useful for all DH project planners and every team member
- Draw focus to areas of a project that could be more sustainable



The Questionnaire



projectendings.github.io

**Come with us if you want
your project to live**

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